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C O N F I D E N T I A L JAKARTA 000858

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, PRM, DRL, S/CT; NSC  
FOR EPHU

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ID](#) [CE](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKAN MIGRANTS LAND IN INDONESIA

REF: A. MEDAN (S.STEIN) - OPS CENTER TELCON 05-15-09

[1](#)B. JAKARTA 629

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

[1](#)1. (U) This message was coordinated with Consulate Medan.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY. A vessel carrying 55 Sri Lankan men ran aground in Aceh, Sumatra, on May 14. The group apparently was fleeing conflict in Sri Lanka and hoped to seek political asylum in Australia. The GOI has secured the group and is reviewing whether the men have any links to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has also gained access to the group. UNHCR is expected to gain access soon to determine their status. Indonesia is already taking care of about 200 refugees from Burma in Aceh. END SUMMARY.

SRI LANKANS IN SUMATRA

[1](#)3. (C) In what is believed to be a first, Sri Lankan migrants have landed on the shores of Indonesia. IOM has completed initial processing of the 55 Sri Lankan men whose boat broke apart on May 14 near the western coast of Sumatra in Nagan Raya District, Aceh Province, according to IOM Indonesia's Steve Hamilton. All are reportedly in good health. The local government is providing food, shelter, and medical care.

ANY LINKS TO THE LTTE?

[1](#)4. (C) The men are currently housed in a government building. Military and police are providing security and ensuring the group remains together, local authorities told ConGen Medan. Lt. General (ret'd) Agus Widjojo, a senior adviser to President Yudhoyono, told Pol/C on May 16 that the GOI is concerned about the situation and is reviewing whether any of the men have links to the LTTE. IOM has the names and photos of all 55 but could not confirm any further details at this point, Hamilton of IOM told Labatt. Pol/C spoke with the Sri Lankan Embassy, which confirmed that it is working with the GOI to determine their identity.

[1](#)5. (U) An early press report that the men were actually claiming to be Tamil Tigers does not appear to be correct. The local authority's communication with the group has been through one Malay speaker. That person was quoted in the Indonesian press as saying, "We are not Tamil Tigers. We are civilians who are seeking political asylum in Australia. Many of our relatives were victims of the military in Sri Lanka. We hope the international community can help. We are afraid of being shot."

#### IOM PROVIDING CARE

¶6. (C) IOM is currently providing care to the group. UNHCR is expected to be given access soon to determine their status. The group will be handled under IOM's normal caseload, using funding from the Australian government for stranded migrants heading to Australia, Hamilton confirmed. Those who qualify as political refugees will be cared for by IOM in Indonesia. IOM already cares for 60 Sri Lankans with refugee status at Indonesia's Lombok Island.

¶7. (SBU) The 55 Sri Lankans were reportedly part of a group of 150 who departed Sri Lanka on May 2 after paying USD 1,500 each to a ship's captain. After eight days' sailing, the group was divided and the men were transferred to a smaller boat which broke apart in western Aceh, local media reported. One Sri Lankan on the boat reportedly drowned, although this remains unclear, Hamilton said. It is not clear whether all the men are Tamil (presumably they are) nor where the point of departure was in Sri Lanka.

#### JOINING THE CROWD IN ACEH

¶8. (C) Separately, nearly 200 Rohingyas from Burma and Bangladeshi migrants remain on the east coast of Aceh in two locations since being stranded there earlier this year. The GOI continues to provide for them with IOM assistance. UNHCR has completed screening these groups and submitted its findings to the GOI (see ref B).

HUME